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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #5748/01 3411235
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071235Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5741
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 005748

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/15/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: LEVADA CENTER ANALYSIS OF RECENT POLLING DATA

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (d)

Summary -----

¶1. (C) In polls leading up to the December 2 elections, the Levada Center brought to light some hidden characteristics of the Russian electorate. Based on the Center's data, it was clear that Putin's popularity transcended party affiliation spreading even to the Communist Party (KPRF) and the traditional liberal- democratic parties Yabloko and Union of Right Forces (SPS). According to Leonid Sedov, the Russian electorate poorly understands the roles of parties and the Duma. Instead, they are swayed by a desire for stability and economic growth which they believe will come from Putin's Plan, even though the electorate does not understand what the plan entails. The data show that the electorate wants a strong role for the state in all facets of life, which helps explain the marginalization and diminution of the liberal-democratic parties. The strong support for Putin among voters of all political parties helps put the results of the election in context. End summary.

Leonid Sedov, the Godfather of Russian Public Opinion -----

¶2. (C) Leonid Sedov, a senior analyst at the Levada Center, has analyzed public opinion polls since the late 1970s when he began working with the late Yuriy Levada. He helped Levada set up the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) in 1988. After the fall of the USSR, the center continued producing public opinion research although it relied on private contracts for funding. In 2003, the Russian government took over VTsIOM, which VTsIOM employees left with Levada to form a new center. Sedov insisted that the Levada Center does not work with the Presidential Administration and that the Kremlin has not interfered in the surveys conducted or results published by the Levada Center.

The Duma Elections -----

¶3. (C) In the run-up to the December 2 elections, Sedov said that voters saw the Communist Party (KPRF) as the only viable opposition party to YR. Smaller parties such as Yabloko, SPS, or the Agrarian Party could not hope to make it into the Duma.

Duma: A Mystery to Most Russians -----

¶4. (C) According to Sedov, polling has showed that the Russian electorate only dimly understands the role of the Duma and that of political parties. The electorate does not follow the voting patterns of Duma deputies, nor do non-governmental organizations. The fact that there was no

public outcry following the decision to change from a mixed single-mandate/proportional representation voting system to a proportional system was a symptom of this poor understanding.

The electorate on December 2 scarcely understood whom they were voting for or to whom they could turn to as their elected representative. Voters saw the election as a vote for or against Putin.

Putin Has a Plan, No One Has Seen It

15. (C) Although the voters had no idea what Putin's Plan was, they approve of Putin and they believe him (and United Russia) when he says he has one. In a Levada Center poll of 1600 respondents, fully 65 percent believed there was a specific plan, and almost 60 percent believed that the plan would make Russia strong, wealthy, and well-off. Only six percent said they could explain what the plan was, however, and half had heard no details of the plan.

16. (C) More important than the specifics of the Putin plan was stability and economic growth which those surveyed attributed to Putin. The electorate also approved of Russia's greater international influence. Although the media have been hampered by the Kremlin, voters paradoxically believe freedom of expression has improved under Putin.

17. (C) Sedov was surprised that Putin had not been taken to task for the failings of the government by either the voters or political elites. In particular, he saw corruption as dominating Russian life. However, the electorate viewed Putin as having tried to curtail the rampant bureaucracy that causes it. They did not judge Putin guilty of contributing to the problem. Similarly, the problem of inflation has begun to occupy ordinary Russians' lives, partly from fear of a repeat of the early 1990's and partly from slow increases in real wages. However, the electorate had not connected the problem to Putin. Rather the voters again saw the bureaucracy as the main culprit.

Russians Want Greater State Involvement

18. (C) According to a Levada Center poll conducted October 19-23, a majority of Russians support a greater government role in the economy. Only 26 percent indicated they would vote for a party that proposed less state involvement in the economy, and 38 percent would vote against it. Almost two-thirds would vote for a party that proposed a greater role in the economy and government regulation of market-oriented reforms. Two-thirds would vote for the re-establishment of the social protections and pensions that existed prior to perestroika. More than half would vote for a party that advocated strengthening law and order, even at the expense of democratic freedoms.

The Revolution Eats Its Young

19. (C) Sedov prepared a separate report on SPS and Yabloko for internet distribution. Because most who work in the Levada Center support these smaller, liberal-democratic parties, information demonstrating their dire circumstances was not published during the campaign. According to this report, both SPS and Yabloko are on the verge of disappearing. Since January, neither party polled above four percent in the Levada Center national polls, which revealed that the Russian electorate did not consider Yabloko or SPS a credible opposition to the Kremlin and the president. While 66 percent of respondents believed in the need for a serious opposition party, only 30 percent viewed Yabloko as that opposition, and fewer, 18 percent, consider SPS to be a credible opposition. (From the same polls, 20 percent of the population discounted the need for an opposition.) Forty-two percent of respondents viewed KPRF as an opposition party.

110. (C) Levada center polls showed also that many voters view Yabloko as a party of cultural elites and oligarchs and

less a party of the general electorate (i.e., workers, the army etc.). Only three percent of all respondents indicated Yabloko was a party of the poor, the common people and the workers. Of Yabloko voters, 56 percent view the party as serving the interests of common Russians. SPS voters held the strong view that Yabloko serves mainly the cultural elite and the intelligentsia.

¶11. (C) Questions about SPS provided analogous results. The average voter believes SPS is a party of oligarchs, businessmen, and to a lesser extent, the middle class. On the other hand, SPS voters portrayed their party as the party of the middle class and working people. The Yabloko electorate in the polls generally characterized SPS as a party of oligarchs and the middle class.

Everyone Is For Putin

¶12. (U) When asked in a November 9-13 if the country was heading in the right direction, 63 percent of KPRF voters answered "no," while 74 percent of YR voters answered "yes." SR, SPS and Yabloko voters largely agreed with the Communists. As might be expected, 98 percent of YR voters approved President Putin's policies. Interestingly 59 percent of Communists did as well. Support for Putin was overwhelming among the voters for all other parties: 81 percent among LDPR voters, 65 percent for SR voters, and 92 percent for SPS voters. Yabloko voters were more critical, but still 60 percent registered their approval. Putin's popularity, in other words, transcends all parties, and differs only in degrees.

¶13. (U) In the same poll, respondents were asked if the interests of the administration and the interests of society coincide. Although the majority of voters felt not, the differences among the parties are striking. Among the Communists, 85 percent do not feel that the interests of two coincide while among YR voters, 43 percent thought they did, and 48 percent said they do not. For SR, SPS, and Yabloko, the majority believed there was a difference in interests, although not to the same extent as the Communists. Although the answers to this one question should not be exaggerated, they indicate a strong feeling among Russians that the state's interests differ from society's.

Comment

¶14. (C) Sedov's analysis of Levada Center data suggest that while the Kremlin sought to manufacture a specific outcome, that outcome (overwhelming support for United Russia) would have come about in any case. Levada Center analyses show the Russian electorate's desire for a paternalistic government (whether for cultural reasons or in reaction to the chaos of the 1990s) expresses itself as a preference for a strong central government under Putin and United Russia.
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